




LAWRENCE BOARD OF REALTORS®  
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## 2023 CITY COMMISSION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

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### **Biographical Information**

**Occupation:** Director of Advocacy – Trust Women Foundation

**Previous Government Experience:** City Commissioner (2021-Present)

### **Involvement in Community Activities:**

- Oral Health Kansas Board Member 2013-2019
- Central Exchange Member 2019-2020
- Lawrence Human Relations Commission 2020-2021
- League of Women Voters Member 2018-Present
- Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. Member/Committee Chair 2000-Present
- NAACP Member 2017-Present
- Kansas Birth Equity Advisory Board Member 2021-Present

### **Positions on Important Issues**

#### **Priority Issues:**

#### **1. *What are your three top public policy priorities if you are elected to the City Commission?***

To accomplish true prosperity and economic security, we must breathe innovation into our economic development strategies for new small business growth. Understanding the nuances and roadblocks of the small business experience, especially those from systemically and structurally divested populations, is critical. We cannot continue to operationalize programs and policies that do not support the need for direct funding that grows the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Lawrence. One way to move this effort is by reimagining current funding from our Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to expand opportunities for equitable small business growth citywide.

The second would be to continue to work on the countywide housing plan and strategies to bridge access to housing for all. This approach must balance the desire for market-rate housing with the need for moderate-income and permanent supportive housing for unhoused individuals. With additional state tools and policies, our city can continue bringing on more affordable housing, including mid-market density housing. The Kansas Affordable Housing Tax Credit enacted by HB 2237 in 2022 leverages state housing tax credits alongside federal LIHTC funds. The recent expansion of the Reinvestment Housing Incentive District program utilizes a percentile rebate back to developers who complete improvements to property (or properties) within an approved RHID redevelopment plan. Coupled with current efforts to revise our zoning codes, Lawrence will be able to grow homeownership in an economically diverse way that brings equity in homeownership that our city has not seen in decades. Funding strategies must emphasize legislative action to appropriate some of the projected \$3.2 billion surplus cash our state general fund has in its coffers. This funding will assist communities in bringing new permanent supportive, low, and moderate-income housing online through collaborative development with the private sector and area community housing development organizations.

Lastly, we must continue positioning ourselves to benefit from the potential economic spillover, manufacturing, and supplier hub impacts the Panasonic battery plant will create. This work requires a balance of nonfinancial and sector-specific financial incentives, each critical to boosting economic growth and increasing tax collection. Incentives that address infrastructure improvements, targeted workforce training, expedited processes, and access to developed industrial sites are vital to attracting businesses for the City's economic growth.

## **Housing Policy:**

### **2. What does "housing affordability" mean to you?**

I would use the HUD definition of affordable housing because what is affordable to any household depends on that household's income. People should be able to find housing that allows them to spend 30% or less of their household income on rent or mortgage, and utilities. Anyone who spends more than that is considered "housing cost-burdened."

### **3. Several studies, local and state-wide, have confirmed that Lawrence has insufficient housing inventory to meet market demand. As a result, Lawrence has seen housing prices rise faster than neighboring communities. How would you suggest Lawrence address this availability and affordability gap?**

The current City Commission has made strides to address our low housing inventory. Since July 2022, the Commission has voted to annex over 170 acres of land for housing development. Along with the review and rewrite of the Land Development Code, we are moving steadily towards addressing the city's housing inventory needs.

### **4. The Lawrence Board of Realtors® believes that everyone in Lawrence should have access to safe, affordable housing and that everyone should be able to experience homeownership within their means. Meeting the demand for moderately priced housing is difficult. The City of Lawrence has identified Affordable Housing as a major priority. Do you support development policies that increase the cost of residential development? Please explain.**

Historically, housing policies have never been created to ensure accessible, affordable housing for all. Zoning laws that catered to single-family detached or dense multifamily units created a diverse gap in medium-density housing options. Everyone in Lawrence should have access to safe, affordable housing and should be able to experience homeownership within their means if they choose. I also acknowledge that people I know, and myself need help finding moderately priced housing on the market. Addressing the "missing middle" requires

### **Would you support new development policies that would incentivize new residential development meeting market demand to supply workforce housing at \$250,000 or less? Please explain.**

I would listen to housing experts looking at this from multiple perspectives, from the regular housing market and our community housing service providers, to get a stronger sense of the pros and cons of specific incentive packages or programs. I also understand that financing such projects can be complicated, and there would need to be subsidies, such as what we currently have to some degree with the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. Different mechanisms, such as inclusionary zoning that other states have employed to spur affordable housing only work if there are incentives built in. Kansas has made it illegal to have mandatory inclusionary zoning. I would look favorably on incentives that spurred housing rehabilitation and mixed-income residential neighborhoods. The Affordable Housing Tax Credit and Housing Incentive District Program give municipalities tools to address workforce housing needs. In addition, local elected officials and other local partners must lobby Legislators to appropriate funds from our \$3 Billion sales tax surplus to subsidize such housing.

**5. *The City of Lawrence recently passed Ordinance 6690, providing protections in housing based on source of income and immigration status. The Lawrence Board of Realtors® raised several concerns regarding how the ordinance will impact sales transactions and Landlords of Lawrence have filed a lawsuit challenging the ordinance. What is your position on source of income and immigration status protections?***

I voted to ensure that source of income and immigration status protections are provided to individuals receiving rental assistance. Speaking as someone who once utilized rental assistance during a professional transition, most concerns against such an ordinance are based on hypotheticals, hyperbole, and anecdotal cases that should not be used to assess the collective. Concerns regarding potential property damage and nonpayment exist just as much for tenants not receiving assistance as tenants who do. It is essential to state that the ordinance's intent was never meant to create overreach but to ensure that access to housing is not hindered by biased practices that disproportionately impact the working class, disabled individuals, and our senior community who choose to age in place.

As stated by the National Fair Housing Alliance, it is illegal for a landlord or real estate agent to treat an individual differently because of their immigration status. While immigrants may not be able to produce a credit history and pass a background check, an individual's ability to pay rent or qualification as a tenant is not necessarily connected to their immigration status.

***How do you feel about going further to limit a Landlord from using a background check and/or credit history to evaluate rental applicants?***

Background checks and/or credit history reviews should be based on weight, use, and intention. While a background check and credit history weigh the quantitative potential tenant, it doesn't speak to the comprehensive rental worthiness of the tenant. A landlord must balance the quantitative with the qualitative. The average credit (FICO) score in the U.S. is 714 – in Kansas, it's 721. The national average most landlords are looking for ranges from 600 – 650 since most renters don't have the credit history to boost their credit score. Landlords can participate in services that report tenant rental payments to increase their credit records. Additionally, using a renter's credit score, which focuses more on a tenant's rental history versus things like debt or credit card payments, is a best practice used to minimize the perception of discrimination or bias.

**6. *Lawrence has experienced unprecedented growth in the unhoused population in the last several years. What role do you believe the City should play in addressing this issue?***

I can't entirely agree that Lawrence has seen unprecedented growth in our unhoused population. First, the definition of unhoused/homeless is not universally defined across local, state, and federal agencies – as a result, individuals experiencing homelessness have never been accurately determined. Second, the HUD Point-in-Time Count (PIT) only accounts for sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night, which does not accurately reflect the unhoused population. Lastly, the pandemic created a pathway for unhoused individuals to move out of the shadows and into the light, exposing many systems gaps that are part of a complex failed system on the local, state, and federal levels.

Addressing the unhoused in our community has been a point of conflict – politically, socially, and culturally. The whole landscape of the issue is sometimes challenging to comprehend fully. Stigma against and dehumanizing people experiencing homelessness must be mitigated in our city. To create a meaningful impact, we must acknowledge that an increased behavioral health workforce- additional permanent, affordable housing and temporary sheltering is vital to moving Lawrence and the county in the right direction. With an initial cost estimate exceeding \$50M, as noted in the Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan, the need for state-level financial support is tantamount to moving Lawrence toward functional zero.

- 7. The City is currently undergoing a review and re-write of the Land Development Code. What changes to zoning, design, historic preservation, or other requirements in the Land Development Code to you think would encourage housing development?**

The most considerable amendments that could be made to the Land Development Code center around diversifying residential zoning types to include Accessory Dwelling Units, addressing parking requirements for residential builds, and reviewing the impact of lot development within environs and the process of review from the Historic Resources Commission.

#### **Energy Efficiency**

- 8. In March 2020, the City of Lawrence adopted Ordinance 9744, establishing a goal of 100% clean, renewable energy in all municipal operations by 2025 and city-wide by 2030. The Kansas Legislature pre-empted this ordinance during the 2021 session with the Energy Choice Act. What is your opinion regarding clean energy policies, and how should we balance environmentally conscious policies with the rising cost of housing and utilities?**

It has been reported that the cost of providing energy through coal plants is more expensive now than solar and wind. Most people are unfamiliar with the subsidies and protections built into Kansas statutes and policies. Environmental, energy-efficient housing is a cost investment that will lead to lower utility costs for people living in those units. Individuals in older units often have very high utility costs because units are not well-insulated. The colossal utility bills accrued during the polar vortex that brought a deep freeze in 2021 were not wind or solar occurrences. We need good data to assess the relationship between environmentally sustainable policies and utility costs.

#### **Economic Development:**

- 9. When appropriate, do you support the use of economic development incentives (such as industrial revenue bonds, tax abatements, rebates, community improvement districts, etc.) to attract or retain jobs and economic development investments in our community? Please explain your answer.**

Economic development incentives promote and cultivate growth in a community. While I support incentives, they must be competitive without creating a service gap for our community. Effective incentive strategies must be evaluated for their actual value to a project(s) versus the value presented by any economic development entity or partner.

- 10. How would you propose to balance the need for economic development and increasing density in our City with preservation of the City's character and historic resources and monuments?**

The balance of these competing values requires a collaborative, shared goal that must be created. Individuals often describe Lawrence as a "city with a small-town identity." I believe the steps we must take to develop shared expectations include growing small business access and incentives through historic revitalization, well-integrated infill, and ample multimodal-friendly public transportation. Zoning modernization will drive what collaboration will look like. Now is the opportunity to address processes, preservation, and planning. We have seen precedence established of what success could look like from other communities.

#### **City Budget Issues and Property Taxes:**

- 11. In terms of your priorities on the City Commission, how highly would you prioritize your commitment to decreasing, or limiting future increases in the mill levy rate?**

A commitment to reduce our mill levy is always top of mind. The ability of the City Commission to attract commercial/industrial growth would make the case much more manageable. To expedite such a timeline, acknowledgment of the need to reduce services must be agreed upon as we work to complete CIP projects and adequately manage our infrastructure assets.

Thank you for your valuable time and cooperation in completing this candidate questionnaire. Your response will be greatly appreciated and will be distributed to our membership so they can make an adequate judgment on the merits of the candidates. Please return this questionnaire to our office by July 14, 2023.

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